



Parliamentary Assembly
Assemblée parlementaire

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COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

AS/Per (2020) PV 01 rev
30 April 2020

Standing Committee

Minutes

**of the meeting held in Paris
on 6 March 2020**

1. OPENING OF THE MEETING

Mr Rik Daems, President of the Assembly, opened the meeting at 9.30 am and thanked the French National Assembly for its hospitality. He reported on his recent activities, saying that he had held over forty meetings since being elected. He intended to be a full-time President and was counting on the vice-presidents of the Assembly and the committee chairs to assist him and ensure that the Assembly's activities had a real impact on the lives of Europe's citizens and the upholding of their rights.

2. VERIFICATION OF NEW CREDENTIALS

Doc. 15091

The Standing Committee **ratified** the credentials of the new members and substitutes in respect of the parliamentary delegations of Germany, Poland and Spain, as set out in document Doc. 15091.

3. CHANGES IN THE MEMBERSHIP OF COMMITTEES

Commissions (2020) 03
+ Add 1

The Standing Committee **ratified** the changes in the membership of Assembly committees, in respect of the delegations of Germany, Poland and Spain, as set out in document Commissions (2020) 03, and also in the membership of the Committee on the Honouring of Obligations and Commitments by Member States of the Council of Europe (Monitoring Committee) and the Committee on Rules, Immunities and Institutional Affairs, as set out in document Commissions (2020) 03 Add. 1.

4. CURRENT AFFAIRS DEBATES

The President informed the Standing Committee that a request for a current affairs debate had been tabled by Mr Kox on behalf of his political group (UEL) on "Recent developments at the Turkish-Greek-Bulgarian borders: how to safeguard human rights?". At its meeting on the previous day, the Bureau of the Assembly had decided to recommend that this current affairs debate be held and designated Mr Kox as the first speaker.

5. AGENDA

AS/Per (2020) OJ 01 rev2

The President informed the Standing Committee that the report on the observation of the parliamentary elections in Azerbaijan would be debated at the Assembly's next part-session. The revised draft agenda was **adopted**.

6. SECOND PART-SESSION OF THE PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY (20-24 APRIL 2020)

AS/Bur (2020) 10

Pursuant to Rule 27.4 of the Assembly's Rules of Procedure, the Standing Committee **took note** of the draft agenda for the second part-session of 2020.

7. REFERENCES TO COMMITTEES

AS/Bur (2020) 12

The Standing Committee **ratified** the references to committees (see Appendix I).

8. CURRENT AFFAIRS DEBATE (RULE 53 OF THE ASSEMBLY'S RULES OF PROCEDURE)

The President asked the members to keep strictly to the subject of the current affairs debate on "**Recent developments at the Turkish-Greek-Bulgarian borders: how to safeguard human rights?**", mentioning the ceasefire agreement in Syria agreed by Russia and Turkey the previous day. A summit was shortly to be held between the Turkish President, the French President, the British Prime Minister and the German Chancellor to examine the humanitarian situation at the borders of Greece. It was only by adopting a joint position on the question that any impact could be made in terms of protecting the fundamental rights of the communities concerned.

Mr Kox introduced the debate by raising the question of what could be done to safeguard human rights in this situation and help the communities concerned, which was an obligation for all the member States. The ceasefire agreement agreed by the Turkish and Syrian military forces, which he described in detail, would take some pressure off the communities suffering as a result of the fighting between the Syrian army and the Syrian rebels. The agreement also meant that President Erdoğan could no longer argue that he had no option other than to open Turkey's borders with Greece and Bulgaria. That decision had triggered a new humanitarian emergency, with refugees and migrants trapped at the borders between Turkey, Greece and Bulgaria in the middle of winter. Greece might decide to suspend its obligations under the Convention relating to the status of refugees, which would jeopardise the international system of refugee protection. The civil war in Syria had caused an enormous humanitarian crisis, with 3,500,000 Syrian refugees dependent on aid from Turkey, joined in recent years by migrants from Afghanistan, Pakistan and African countries. The agreement concluded between the European Union and Turkey in 2016 had not lived up to expectations and no one was able to check whether the European Union's money had been correctly used by the Turkish authorities and how. Finding a solution to the humanitarian crisis required the international community to agree on a lasting solution to the war in Syria. A special European Union summit would be desirable in this respect.

For its part, the Council of Europe had to assume its role and make a stand for the protection of human rights. The communique issued by the Commissioner for Human Rights was along these lines. He proposed that the Council of Europe Secretary General make an on-the-spot visit, accompanied by representatives of the two statutory bodies – the Parliamentary Assembly and the Committee of Ministers. The co-rapporteurs for monitoring should also make a fact-finding visit, particularly to the border area in order to provide the Assembly with first-hand information on the situation. The Council of Europe had a responsibility to send out a number of messages: the international community had to agree on finding a way out of the conflict in Syria; Russia and Turkey must be called on to maintain the ceasefire and put an end to the conflict in north-west Syria; Turkey had to be called on to stop opening its borders and pushing people towards no-man's land, and Greece must refrain from completely closing its borders, honour its international obligations as regards asylum and not expel people requesting asylum; Turkey and Greece had to put a stop to the violence committed by their authorities against people at their borders, cease pushing people back towards the sea and comply with the Convention relating to the status of refugees; the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers had to show true solidarity and shared responsibility with regard to Syrian refugees and make use of all existing legal instruments; the European Union must be called on to provide immediate support for Greece and take steps for the resettlement of refugees, especially unaccompanied minors trapped on Greek islands; the European Union and Turkey had to be called on to revise agreements that had not stood the test of time and conclude a new one under which Turkey would be responsible for the protection of Syrian refugees and the financial burden would be shared between all the Union's member States.

The members viewed a video screened at the request of Ms Bakoyannis.

Ms Bakoyannis said that she had written to the chairs of the national delegations stressing the urgency of the unprecedented situation at the land and maritime borders with Turkey. The ceasefire agreement signed the previous day was an important step towards de-escalation but still did not resolve the situation in Idlib. It would also enable President Erdoğan to take a more responsible attitude towards the refugee issue, which was being used to exert pressure on Europe. Many of those having arrived at the border with Greece were migrants from Afghanistan, Somalia, Iraq or elsewhere, and only 2.8% were Syrian refugees. Those arriving more recently at the border claimed to be Syrian because they knew they did not qualify as refugees. Greece was recovering from ten years of economic crisis and was not capable of resolving the problem. The Greek islands could not absorb these mass arrivals. Greece was not prepared for taking in such a huge influx of asylum seekers and that was why it had suspended the taking in of refugees; this would resume when the necessary infrastructures had been put in place for examining asylum requests. Greece currently had 70,000 asylum requests to contend with. The Assembly had to send a clear message to Turkey: instrumentalising the fate of these poor people was not an acceptable policy. She had always voiced her support for Turkey in taking in refugees and had called for increased support, but Turkey was blackmailing the European Union and that was something different.

Mr Kiliç commented on the video shown, pointing out that the Turkish authorities could not be held accountable for the statements made, which were nothing but lies. The people smugglers interviewed in the video had since been arrested and faced punishment by Turkish courts. Greek border guards and coast guards had shot at migrants. That was the reality, the truth! A Turkish parliamentary delegation led by the chair of the human rights committee had been shot at by Greek security forces while standing in the vicinity of the border. What Ms Bakoyannis had shown could not cover up the images in the media depicting the brutality with which Greek border guards had driven back migrants and refugees. The Greek authorities should take a closer look at the conduct of their security forces. If the refugees wished to stay in Turkey, they could always do so. No one had been forced to leave the country. Turkey had been admitting refugees to its territory for ten years now. There were 4 million refugees in Turkey, who were mainly Syrian; 680,000 Syrian children had been taken in and placed in the Turkish education system. The refugees and migrants massing at the border did not wish to be taken in

by Greece but by Italy, the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany or France. The question was not how human rights should be applied but what to do with all these people! Germany had invested millions of euros to take in a million refugees. But what were the other European countries doing? Turkey had been left to handle the problem on its own, and that had been going on for years. Ten years was a long time. Who had responded to its requests for assistance? Where were Turkey's partners? The humanitarian situation was worrying and there were communities in need of assistance. But the claims that this was Turkey's responsibility had to stop. Turkey was no longer able or willing to shoulder the burden of this situation alone. All organisations or individuals with an interest in what was going on were welcome in Turkey. Turkey had constantly informed and warned European States of what was happening. And who had come? Nobody. There were now 850,000 refugees and migrants in Istanbul. Who had spoken up to remind Greece of its human rights commitments? Who had told it to stop shooting at people at the border? What support had Turkey received when its towns and villages had been destroyed? What co-operation had it received in return after sending the terrorists it had arrested back to certain European countries such as France? Turkey had also passed on plentiful intelligence on terrorist and drug trafficking networks to them. The PKK was the terrorist organisation bringing drugs into Europe from Afghanistan and Pakistan.

In the view of **Ms Sayek Böke**, there was a war that had not yet ended and a humanitarian crisis that was not new. The efforts made to date were not working. The origins of the crisis had to be addressed and all the protagonists had to assume their responsibilities. They had a duty to do so. There was a collective responsibility calling for a collective solution: no country, individually, could resolve this problem alone. It was not about punishing a country, or saving a country, but saving people, millions of people. The focus had to be on human rights and promoting the existing instruments: these people were entitled to security, health care and food. Turkey had done this and continued to do so but it was a burden that had to be shared with the whole of Europe and not just with the European Union.

Sir Roger Gale pointed to two problems: that of economic migration, against a backdrop of trafficking in human beings, and that of 3.5 million Syrian refugees. This humanitarian situation was an issue of collective responsibility. These Syrian refugees had to be kept close to their country, as it seemed clear that the vast majority of them would return home once peace had been restored. The problem stemmed from a conflict that was unresolved and being perpetuated by proxy, through the actions and interventions of forces backing the Syrian regime or opposed to it. Therein lay the entire problem. Europe had a share of responsibility. This question ought to be debated at the next part-session.

Mr Kiljunen welcomed the ceasefire and hoped that France and Germany would continue to be involved in further discussions on settling the conflict. The humanitarian crisis and the refugee problem were rooted in the war and the lack of rudimentary security conditions. The European Union's borders with Turkey were common to all its 28 member States: consequently, Finland supported the efforts of the States involved on the front line, including Greece, and the implementation of the Geneva Convention. It was the shared duty of all the States to share the burden of taking in refugees and migrants and to push for the resolution of the humanitarian issues.

Mr Fridez emphasised the utter horror of the conflict in Syria and the substantial role played by the adjacent countries in taking in refugees, not only Turkey but also Jordan and Lebanon. Even though Europe was not responsible for the situation in Syria, it had closed its eyes for years to the situation in Turkey and on the Greek islands. There was a duty of solidarity. Dialogue had to be forged with all the protagonists with a view to providing the countries in the front line with the necessary resources. The system of relocation that had been introduced was not effective. The countries of initial relocation, such as Italy, had not received the aid expected from the secondary relocation countries. The situation had to be assessed in an on-the-spot visit. The Assembly should hold a joint debate at its next session based on two reports submitted by the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy and the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons.

Mr Maire acknowledged that Turkey was a victim of the consequences of the conflict in Syria but he did not accept it calling European countries into question in this way, through overtly assumed blackmail. The European Union had spent 15.9 billion euros since 2015 on humanitarian aid to Syrian refugees. The burden in terms of security, policing and humanitarian aid had to be shared.

Ms Brynjólfssdóttir stressed how worrying and unprecedented the humanitarian situation was. The refugees were pawns being pushed around by States in their geopolitical battles. Action was required now and the focus had to be on the concrete steps to be taken. Like Mr Kiliç, she wondered where the European countries had been all this time. Where was the solidarity? Had these countries taken in thousands of refugees? Certainly not. Each country had to take its share of responsibility, effectively and through concrete action, and show solidarity to avoid any worsening of the humanitarian crisis.

Mr Pocij strongly condemned the attitude of a government that invited or encouraged people to rush to the borders with neighbouring countries. Obviously, he acknowledged that Europe had left Turkey to deal with the

situation. At the same time, he could not agree with criticism of Greece for reacting in the way it had; each country could have a different reaction in an emergency. It also had to be understood which categories of people were involved. Migrants were not refugees; their situations were completely different from a legal viewpoint, particularly as States' obligations were concerned, and accordingly called for different solutions.

Mr Nick thought that this debate was a good illustration of how the Assembly could be useful in finding a solution. The civil war in Syria had caused the problem but, beyond the humanitarian crisis, there was a crisis of civilisation in which most international humanitarian law standards had been violated. The pressure exerted by Turkey was not surprising but it was not acceptable either. Had people really thought that the agreement between Turkey and the European Union was going to become a permanent fixture? More co-operation, not confrontation, was needed. How could a common future in Europe be envisaged without coming to an agreement on refugees, a clear, collective, solidarity-based response?

Mr Gutiérrez agreed with the points made by Mr Kox in his introductory statement and backed any initiatives that could resolve the humanitarian situation in line with the human rights conventions. The root cause of the problem still had to be dealt with. The ceasefire agreement was welcome in this connection. The emphasis had to be on collective action and making the Council of Europe's voice heard more clearly.

Ms Stienen pointed out that Syria had also taken in many refugees before the start of conflict: Iraqis, Afghans, Sudanese and Somalis. The refugees should not be regarded as a "burden". It was a country's citizens who decided whether or not to take a share of responsibility, bearing in mind that the emotional impact of images of migrants and displaced refugees was made all the stronger by the chord it might strike in everyone's family history. It was important to assume our responsibilities without being afraid of our citizens. The Netherlands promoted a transparent migration policy, aimed at protecting vulnerable individuals, because they had been persecuted, but no one was saying "let's throw our borders wide open and take in all-comers".

Mr Tolstoï regretted that this debate had not taken place five years earlier and argued that the migration crisis was the result of the action taken by the international coalition in Syria. Any intervention had consequences: that had been the case in Afghanistan, Yugoslavia, Iraq and Libya. What had the western countries done in Syria? The fight against the IS in Syria had above all enabled the western international coalition to get its hands on the oilfields! Russia had come to Syria's aid to fight and cut the numbers of IS terrorists and to safeguard its sovereignty. It was obvious that the burden of Syrian refugees had to be borne by everyone. Taking concrete decisions also meant taking in those refugees – and some countries could help them to appreciate democratic values in this way – until such time as they could return home.

Ms Christoffersen thought that, on the contrary, the same discussion had been taking place over and over again for five years and still with no solution emerging. What was at stake here were human lives. What had we done about taking responsibilities? On this point, if a country did not want to do its fair share in taking in refugees, then it had to contribute financially. Turkey and Greece could take on this task and benefit from the corresponding financial measures. Fact-finding missions could be organised and Assembly rapporteurs sent but did we have any real solutions? Could the Council of Europe make a difference and show itself capable of influencing our governments?

Ms Trisse made the point that the conflict in Syria had been dragging on since the Arab spring against a backdrop of power games for high geopolitical stakes and economic and energy-sector interests. The Council of Europe was the only political arena where the question could be discussed together with Turkish and Greek representatives. The Council of Europe had to assert itself as the spokesperson for human rights and be a strong player in parallel with the European Union. The reactions of certain States to the humanitarian crisis, in the context of migration, were fuelling the rise of populism and were also a cause for concern.

Ms Bakoyannis strongly denied that Greek law enforcement agencies had shot at anyone at the country's border. If that had really happened, there would be images broadcast on a constant loop in the media. Greece was the target of propaganda and fake news fabricated with archive images from 2015 in other countries. The reality of sharing responsibility was that there were 20,000 minors in Greece, and only France and Finland had agreed to take them in. The current problem involved economic migrants and called for an ad hoc solution.

Mr Kiliç agreed that the entire issue was being instrumentalised by propaganda. It was necessary to work together and avoid any escalation of verbal attacks if efforts were to be made to promote human rights and protect individuals.

The President concluded the debate, which proved that the Council of Europe remained fully relevant where promoting the shared values of human rights was concerned. Lives were at stake and it was every parliamentarian's responsibility to put this issue on their parliament's agenda and to call on governments and

foreign affairs ministers to make a real impact and set about drawing up a common response from the 47 member States. Clearly, the Assembly would come back to this question.

9. MIGRATION, REFUGEES AND DISPLACED PERSONS

Mr Vareikis, rapporteur of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons, presented the report on "**Prevention of violence and discrimination against religious minorities amongst refugees in Europe**" (Doc. 15083), based in particular on the findings of his visits to reception centres, border crossing points and refugee camps. Political problems could not be resolved by technical measures or financial assistance alone. There were religiously motivated crimes being committed against migrants. A climate of respect and dignity, and of living together, had to be created in order to welcome refugees and asylum-seekers, who were vulnerable individuals, providing a safe space for everyone. It was indispensable to put forward effective solutions: dialogue and mediation could help to promote non-discrimination and prevent ethnic and religious conflicts. There had to be specific training for mediators, psychologists and other players. There were examples of good practices in preventing this kind of violence, including freephone hotlines giving victims access to a national ombudsman or the police and the proper training of the staff concerned. A pan-European platform for intercultural and inter-religious dialogue could be set up. Most European States had neglected this aspect.

Mr Fridez, chair of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons, thanked the rapporteur for his commitment and the objectivity with which he had dealt with a tricky subject. The emergence of violence among groups of uprooted refugees, who were in a precarious situation and struggling for survival had to be tackled. The report provided an overview of the situation, taking account of expert opinions and reports by NGOs. The draft resolution highlighted measures to create a climate of respect and dignity and projects encouraging inter-religious and intercultural dialogue, as well as good practices at both national and local level. The important work carried out by the Council of Europe for years in the sphere of intercultural and inter-religious dialogue had to serve as a basis for solutions.

The Standing Committee **adopted** the draft resolution unanimously [Resolution 2328 (2020)].

10. THE FUNCTIONING AND THE FUTURE OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE AND ITS PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY

AS/PC (2020) DOC1
Resolution 2277 (2019)
Doc. 14863
AS/Bur/MR-PA (2018) 8
AS/Bur/MR-PA (2018) 04

The President introduced the discussion, referring to the document he had prepared, which set out his analysis and proposals in detail. The Assembly had repeatedly raised the issues in recent years of its organisation, its effectiveness, its pertinence and the impact of its initiatives. A number of reports had put forward interesting proposals and it was high time that they were put into practice. It was not an easy task. It was his intention, by putting some ideas down on paper, to launch a process that would run over several months and result in their concrete implementation if agreed upon. He had run an initial round-table discussion at the last meeting of the Presidential Committee and also intended to consult the chairs of the national delegations. His proposals were grouped around five themes: reinforcing the political groups; making the Assembly more efficient through internal reform; strengthening the impact of the Assembly through inter-parliamentary contact; generating synergies through political contact; raising awareness to better publicise the Assembly. On the latter point, he was surprised that the reports of the European Parliament drew on the reports produced by the Assembly and the Council of Europe without ever acknowledging the fact.

Greater visibility of the political groups called for a reorganisation of the presence of their chairs in the Assembly chamber. The recent experiment of holding regular meetings on matters of importance to the Organisation between the Presidential Committee and the Bureau of the Committee of Ministers, within the dialogue framework, had yielded good results and should also be pursued. Regarding internal reform, arrangements regarding eminent figures speaking at Assembly part-sessions would have to be reviewed to shorten the time allowed for their speeches and leave more time for spoken questions, so that there was a real exchange. The frustration expressed by the members pointed to the necessity of having a clear rule applied by the President, including to eminent guest speakers. Similarly, the range of eminent figures invited could be reviewed and extended beyond the political and diplomatic spheres to other relevant spheres of competence. The committees' terms of reference should be revised to be able to encompass more topical issues; the environment should not lie solely within the remit of the Social Affairs Committee, for example. Giving the Assembly's actions and

decisions stronger impact called for greater involvement on the part of the members and better use of their dual mandate. The Assembly's members had to be able to monitor the stances taken by their ambassadors in the Committee of Ministers and bring matters to the attention of foreign affairs ministers. The work of parliamentarians in the Assembly should be as important as their national parliamentary work: he intended to push for the negotiation of a co-operation agreement between the Assembly and each national parliament incorporating a number of undertakings. Furthermore, in order to develop political contacts, he intended to visit all the member States during his term of office. Finally, it was necessary to highlight the know-how of the Assembly, which had initiated so many conventions, in tackling new priorities, such as the environment and human rights or artificial intelligence. Young people had to be more involved in discussion on these new issues. The celebration of the 70th anniversary of the European Convention on Human Rights had to be made into a real event, asserting the Council of Europe's unique role and its ability to promote shared values.

Ms Bayr welcomed these interesting proposals. The Assembly should broaden its horizons as regards the eminent figures it invited: the Director general of the World Health Organisation should be invited to speak at the part-session at which the coronavirus pandemic was to be debated. However, if greater diversity was to be reflected by inviting eminent figures from varied backgrounds, she warned of potential abuses if the Assembly opened its podium to figures from the private sphere or the business world. There should also be greater balance in terms of age and gender of invited speakers, particularly if the Assembly was keen to promote youth. The NGOs and youth movements had to be more heavily involved. Certain issues had to be centre-stage, such as artificial intelligence or the combating of domestic violence and ratification of the Istanbul Convention.

Mr Kox reminded the participants that his report on the "Role and mission of the Parliamentary Assembly: main challenges for the future", debated in April 2019 and backed by the vast majority of the members, contained a great many proposals put forward by the national delegations that still had to be put into practice. There were several European organisations, but only one which brought together 47 States under the same roof under a single system for promoting human rights, democracy and the rule of law. In this day and age, it would no longer be possible to create such an organisation. None of its member States wanted to leave. The Assembly's actions had to be demonstrably relevant and the focus had to be on the fundamental areas, drawing up resolutions on serious, major issues. Real synergy with the Committee of Ministers was also to be encouraged, by focusing on recommendations, and therefore accentuating the true parliamentary dimension within the Council of Europe.

Mr Maire observed that the Assembly and the Council of Europe had been in the news when having to sort out their internal governance issues. The Assembly now had to show that it had moved on from this and was capable of withstanding crises: 640 parliamentarians must fully assume their mandate and their role. They had to work to promote our values: certain questions, relating to human rights, non-discrimination and gender equality, would always be valid focal points, but it was now necessary to also target new issues, linked to the environment for example. Some of the proposals put forward by the President fell within his own powers of decision and could easily be implemented, such as the management of speaking time in the Assembly chamber and invitations to eminent figures to speak during sessions. On the latter point, he shared the reservations expressed by Ms Bayr with regard to ethical considerations.

In the view of **Ms Trisse**, it was true that the Organisation had to be freshened up, but with care. The plenary session of the Assembly had to be opened up to other eminent figures, but we should be wary of creating controversy as regards dangers of lobbying or conflicts of interest. Certain topics had to remain as guiding ideas of the Assembly's activities, such as ratification of the Istanbul Convention, which should have as much importance as the abolition of the death penalty had had in the past. She was also in favour of holding regular meetings of chairs of national delegations, pointing out that most of them were not members of the Bureau. Where the reorganising of sessions was concerned, if it was decided that they would continue to run from Monday to Friday, the end-of-week sittings should be "beefed up" with interesting topics.

Ms Brynjólfssdóttir noted a number of positives in the document presented by the President. Efforts had to be made to foster a greater role for women in parliaments, as well as closer links with young people, all the more imperative as young people were showing less interest in politics. She was fully in favour of prioritising the environment and human rights. Regarding the broadening of invitations to new eminent speakers, if Greta Thunberg had been invited to address the European Parliament, then why not invite her to address the Assembly too? Finally, the Istanbul Convention was one of the most fundamental Council of Europe conventions; reticent member States had to be resolutely urged to sign and ratify it.

Mr Cilevičs noted that, while the Council of Europe was undeniably an organisation based on the promotion of values and principles, its strategy was not always very clear: was it a round table or a club that anyone could join? If there was no longer any possibility of imposing sanctions on member States, how could they be compelled to act in the right way and follow the rules? Concerning relations with national parliaments, which clearly had to be strengthened, the picture was far less rosy than the one painted by the President: only half the members, and that was an optimistic figure, participated in Assembly sessions. Priorities had to be established in references to

committees. There was a contradiction here between the core work, including on subjects that were not very attractive or popular, and in some cases highly legal but necessary, and visibility, when there was the incentive of getting involved in issues that would be hot topics for the media. The chain of decision-making for document proposals would have to be revised, and in particular the committee chairs consulted before any decisions were taken by the Presidential Committee and the Bureau. Finally, session agendas had to be slimmed down in order to give priority to the reports presented by the committees. Without a debating slot, there was a risk that adopted reports would become obsolete.

Regarding relations with national parliaments, **Ms Stienen** stressed that the work of representatives and substitutes was equally important, because some could interpret that the substitutes could only participate if representatives were unavailable. This would seriously hinder the effectiveness of some delegations, including the Netherlands delegation, as in our case members of the upper chambers were more flexible with time and availability than the members of our parliament. With regard to eminent figures invited to address the Assembly, she did not think that a figure heavily promoted as being emblematic of the younger generation, such as Greta Thunberg, necessarily embodied the future. We should be wary of clichés and highlight the Assembly as a crossroads of generations. The present, she said, was us. The Council of Europe was the guardian of human rights, not some kind of Sleeping beauty: the human rights instruments were also there to resolve crises. Ultimately, we must be capable of stepping outside our comfort zone. The President's visits had to capture the attention of the media and provide an opportunity to meet not only the authorities but other talking partners from the civil society and youth sectors.

Mr Kiljunen also thought that the Assembly could not focus on youth alone and that the present generation was the one at the controls and had to be mindful of everyone, including the elderly. Besides this, he felt that the structure and organisation of the Assembly's work were far too complex because there were too many bodies – the Presidential Committee, the Bureau, the committees, the political groups and so on – resulting in too many meetings. He was in favour of holding regular meetings with the chairs of the national delegations. Regarding the seating arrangements in the Assembly chamber, he pointed out that the parliamentarians were not only members of political groups but also members of their national delegation, which was why he wished to maintain seating in alphabetical order. The following of the Assembly's activities by national parliaments was fundamental: the Finnish delegation produced an annual report but above all reported on all relevant Assembly decisions in the proceedings of the Finnish Parliament, notably in the questions put to the government. Where parliamentary connections were concerned, there were plentiful opportunities; he urged the development of co-operation with regional organisations such as the Baltic and Nordic assemblies and bilateral co-operation between national parliaments in connection with Council of Europe activities.

The President thanked the members for their contributions to the discussion.

11. OTHER BUSINESS

The Secretary General of the Parliamentary Assembly informed the members of the consequences of the measures already taken by certain governments to manage the coronavirus pandemic for the forthcoming activities of the Assembly and its committees. All the meetings and events scheduled to be held on the premises of the Council of Europe in March had been cancelled, as had the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities session. Rapporteur missions were also likely to be cancelled. The meeting of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy had been cancelled but, where the other committee meetings scheduled over the next two weeks were concerned, the decision was down to each committee chair. It was still too early to take a decision on the April part-session, but some of the reports on the agenda could not be adopted in time. However, if the Secretary General of the Council of Europe issued strict instructions to the Organisation's staff, that would have a bearing on whether or not activities were maintained.

An exchange of views took place, involving **Mr Kiliç**, who thought that the Monitoring Committee meeting in Ankara was compromised and said that it was unlikely that any members of the Turkish delegation would be able to take part in any committee meeting or the April part-session, **Ms Bayr**, who stressed the inconsistencies in the positions adopted by the international organisations with regard to travel bans and proposed that the WHO recommendations be followed, **Sir Roger Gale**, who said that Sir Edward Leigh and himself would be self-isolating at home upon their return on the suspicion that they could have been contaminated by an Italian Assembly member attending the meeting of the Committee on Rules of Procedure two days previously and asked that decisions be taken to cancel meetings until a given date, **Mr Pocij** and **Ms Christoffersen** who asked whether election observation missions were being maintained or cancelled, **Mr Maire**, who reiterated the necessity of complying with the decisions taken by the national authorities and national parliaments hosting meetings, seconded by **Ms Bakoyannis**, **Mr Cilevičs**, who, as a committee chair, noted that more and more members, rapporteurs and experts were dropping out and wished decisions to be taken swiftly, **Mr Fridez**, who warned that the coronavirus epidemic, of which little was known and which was not under control, could

go on for several months, and **Ms Brynjólfsdóttir**, who said that Iceland was particularly badly hit by the epidemic but noted that each country was responding with its own individual measures, with no coordination whatsoever and, in some cases, going well beyond WHO recommendations.

The President concluded that the measures taken by certain governments, which had decided to close their borders and quarantine parliamentarians returning from travel abroad, and also the decisions taken by some parliaments to suspend travel for their members did not make it possible for the Assembly's committees to hold their meetings in acceptable conditions. The committee chairs would be inclined to cancel meetings if invited to do so. Given the uncertainties, he thought it premature at this stage to take a decision on the holding of the next part-session. The Standing Committee, which itself was not competent to decide to cancel committee meetings, could therefore invite the committee chairs to take account of the exceptional circumstances and postpone the meetings scheduled for March.

Agreed.

12. NEXT MEETING

The Standing Committee **decided** to hold its next meeting in Athens on Friday 29 May 2020.

The meeting **rose** at 12.30 pm.

APPENDIX I

Decisions on documents tabled for references to committees

1. **Media freedom, public trust and the people's right to know**
Motion for a resolution tabled by Mr Roberto Rampi and other members of the Assembly
[Doc. 15040](#)

Reference to the Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media *for report*

2. **The control of online communication: a threat to media pluralism, freedom of information and human dignity**
Motion for a resolution tabled by Mr Frédéric Reiss and other members of the Assembly
[Doc. 15041](#)

Reference to the Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media *for report*

3. **Justice and security for women in peace reconciliation**
Motion for a resolution tabled by Ms Yevheniia Kravchuk and other members of the Assembly
[Doc. 15045](#)

Reference to the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination *for report* and to the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy *for opinion*

4. **Follow-up to the humanitarian consequences of the war in Ukraine**
Motion for a resolution tabled by Mr Oleksii Goncharenko and other members of the Assembly
[Doc. 15046](#)

Transmission to the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons *for information*

5. **Relationship between the parliamentary majority and the opposition in a democracy**
Motion for a resolution tabled by the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy
[Doc. 15047](#)

Reference to the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy *for report*

6. **More participatory democracy to tackle climate change**
Motion for a resolution tabled by the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy
[Doc. 15048](#)

Reference to the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy *for report*

7. **Political prisoners in the Russian Federation**
Motion for a resolution tabled by Mr Eerik-Niiles Kross and other members of the Assembly
[Doc. 15049](#)

Reference to the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights *for report*

8. **Condemnation of antisemitism and of the goals of the BDS-Movement**
Motion for a resolution tabled by Mr Reinhold Lopatka and other members of the Assembly
[Doc. 15052](#)

No further action

9. **Exploiting children in rural sectors of coffee and cocoa**
Motion for a resolution tabled by Mr Ulrich Oehme and other members of the Assembly
[Doc. 15053](#)

No further action

10. **Modifications to the Rules of Procedure**
Bureau decision

Reference to the Committee on Rules of Procedure, Immunities and Institutional Affairs *for report*

APPENDIX II

List of participants / Liste des participants

President of the Parliamentary Assembly / Président de l'Assemblée parlementaire

Mr Rik DAEMS Belgium / Belgique

Chairpersons of Political Groups / Présidents des groupes politiques

Ms Selin SAYEK BÖKE Socialists, Democrats and Greens Group (SOC) /
(in the absence of the Chairperson / Groupe des socialistes, démocrates et verts (SOC)
en l'absence du Président)

Mr Aleksander POČIEJ Group of the European People's Party (EPP/CD) /
Groupe du Parti populaire européen (PPE/DC)

M. Jacques MAIRE Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) /
Alliance des démocrates et des libéraux pour l'Europe (ADLE)

Mr Tiny KOX Group of the Unified European Left (UEL) /
Groupe pour la gauche unitaire européenne (GUE)

Vice-Presidents of the Assembly / Vice-président·e·s de l'Assemblée

Sir Roger GALE United Kingdom / Royaume-Uni

Mr Kimmo KILJUNEN Finland / Finlande

M. Gusty GRAAS Luxembourg

Mr Egidijus VAREIKIS Lithuania / Lituanie

Mr Antonio GUTIÉRREZ Spain / Espagne

Mme Nicole TRISSE France

Mr Andreas NICK Germany / Allemagne

M. Petr TOLSTOI Russian Federation / Fédération de Russie

Mr Akif Çağatay KILIÇ Turkey / Turquie

Ms Snježana NOVAKOVIĆ BURSAC Bosnia and Herzegovina / Bosnie-Herzégovine

Mr Irakli KOBAKHIDZE Georgia / Géorgie

Chairpersons of National Delegations / Président·e·s de délégations nationales

Mr Ruben RUBINYAN Armenia / Arménie

Mr Rik DAEMS Belgium / Belgique

Mr Kimmo KILJUNEN Finland / Finlande

Mme Nicole TRISSE France

Mr Irakli KOBAKHIDZE Georgia / Géorgie

Mr Andreas NICK Germany / Allemagne

Ms Theodora BAKOYANNIS Greece / Grèce

Mr Zsolt CSENGER-ZALÁN Hungary / Hongrie

(in the absence of the Chairperson /
en l'absence du Président)

Ms Rósa Björk BRYNJÓLFSDÓTTIR Iceland / Islande

M. Gusty GRAAS Luxembourg

Mr Predrag SEKULIĆ Montenegro

Ms Petra STIENEN Netherlands / Pays-Bas

Ms Lise CHRISTOFFERSEN Norway / Norvège

(in the absence of the Chairperson /
en l'absence de la Présidente)

Mr Włodzimierz BERNACKI Poland / Pologne

(in the absence of the Chairperson /
en l'absence du Président)

M. Luis LEITE RAMOS Portugal

(in the absence of the Chairperson /
en l'absence du Président)

M. Petr TOLSTOI Russian Federation / Fédération de Russie

Mr Antonio GUTIÉRREZ Spain / Espagne

M. Pierre-Alain FRIDEZ	Switzerland / Suisse
Mr Akif Çağatay KILIÇ	Turkey / Turquie
Sir Roger GALE	United Kingdom / Royaume-Uni

**Chairperson of the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights /
Présidente de la Commission des questions juridiques et des droits de l'homme**

Mr Boriss CILEVIČS	Latvia / Lettonie
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**Chairperson of the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development /
Président de la Commission des questions sociales, de la santé et du développement durable**

M. Luis LEITE RAMOS	Portugal
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**Chairperson of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons /
Président de la Commission des migrations, des réfugiés et des personnes déplacées**

M. Pierre-Alain FRIDEZ	Switzerland / Suisse
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**Chairperson of the Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media /
Président de la Commission de la culture, de la science, de l'éducation et des médias**

M. Olivier BECHT	France
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**Chairperson of the Committee on Equality and Non Discrimination /
Président de la Commission sur l'égalité et la non-discrimination**

Ms Petra BAYR	Austria / Autriche
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Rapporteurs

Mr Egidijus VAREIKIS	Lithuania / Lituanie
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Other members of the Parliamentary Assembly

Mr Vladimir VARDANYAN	Armenia / Arménie
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**Secretaries of National Delegations /
Secrétaires de délégations nationales**

Ms Sonja LANGENHAECK	Belgium / Belgique
Mr Tom de PELSMAEKER	Belgium / Belgique
Ms Adisa FIŠIĆ-BARUKČIJA	Bosnia and Herzegovina / Bosnie-Herzégovine
Ms Maria FAGERHOLM	Finland / Finlande
M. Laurent SAUNIER	National Assembly / Assemblée nationale, France
Mr Michael HILGER	Germany / Allemagne
Ms Voula SYRIGOS	Greece / Grèce
Ms Judit GOTSCHALL	Hungary / Hongrie
Mr Martins OLEKSS	Latvia / Lettonie
Ms Selija LEVIN	Lithuania / Lituanie
Ms Femmy BAKKER-DE JONG	Netherlands/ / Pays-Bas
Ms Dorthe BAKKE	Norway / Norvège
Mr Artur ZANIEWSKI	Poland / Pologne
Ms Alja ŠKIBIN	Slovenia / Slovénie
Ms Maria Teresa GOMEZ-BERNARDO	Spain / Espagne
Mr Luis Manuel MIRANDA	Spain / Espagne
Mr Nicholas WRIGHT	United Kingdom / Royaume-Uni

Secretaries of Political Groups / Secrétaires des Groupes politiques

Ms Francesca ARBOGAST	SOC
Ms Maria BIGDAY	ALDE / ADLE

Secretariat of the Parliamentary Assembly / Secrétariat de l'Assemblée Parlementaire

Mr Wojciech SAWICKI	Secretary General / Secrétaire Général
Ms Marja RUOTANEN	Director of Committees Directorate / Directrice de la Direction des commissions
Mr Horst SCHADE	Director of General Services / Directeur des Services Généraux
Mr Mark NEVILLE	Head of the Private Office / Chef de Cabinet
Mr Alfred SIXTO	Head of the Table Office / Chef du Service de la Séance
Mme Valérie CLAMER	Head of the Secretariat of the Committee on Rules of Procedure, Immunities and Institutional Affairs / Chef du Secrétariat de la Commission du Règlement, des immunités et des affaires institutionnelles
Mr Francesc FERRER	Deputy to the Head of the Communication Division / Adjoint au Chef de la Division de la communication
Mme Isild HEURTIN	Head of the Secretariat of the Bureau / Chef du Secrétariat du Bureau
Mme Martine MEYER	Administrative assistant of the Standing Committee / Assistante administrative de la Commission permanente
Ms Susan FELLAH	Assistant of the Standing Committee / Assistante de la Commission permanente
Mme Annick SCHNEIDER	Assistant to the Secretary General / Assistant to the Bureau Assistante du Secrétaire Général / Assistante du Bureau

Council of Europe / Conseil de l'Europe

Mr Bjorn BERGE	Secretary to the Committee of Ministers / Secrétaire du Comité des Ministres
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